

Panax says News Council broke own rules

Panax Corporation has charged the National News Council with violating its own rules in its decision condemning Panax publisher John McGoff.

A ten-page letter prepared by Panax's counsel Miller, Canfield, Paddock and Stone, mailed to all 16 Council members August 11, claimed:

"Among the many violations of the Council's own rules, the most egregious is the total absence of any written complaint, which denied Panax Corporation the opportunity to defend prior to the issuance of the July 11, 1977 denunciation. Fair play, and the appearance of fair play, is essential to an institution which claims the privilege of representing the public interest. Chairman Isaacs' secret complaint, rush to judgment, and surprise press release undermine the credibility of the Council and should be publicly retracted by the Council."

Responding to Panax' charges, Council Chairman Norman Isaacs asserted this week that the Council "had not gone outside the rules. We've taken a lot of things without complaints, the CIA case, UNESCO. We acted through the freedom of the press committee, it's in our original charter."

"Nothing is going to be withdrawn," he added.

According to Isaacs, the Council is polling its members on further action to be taken. It had scheduled a public hearing on the issue Tuesday, August 16, but Panax, in its letter, "respond(ed) to Chairman Isaacs' invitation to attend a 'hearing,'" and notified the Council it would not attend until certain conditions were met. (E&P, Aug. 13)

Panax editorial director James Whelan said this week that Panax did not "withdraw" from the hearing as reported in E&P (August 13).

"We do believe that the National News Council should comply with its own rules of fair play and decency in handling accusations against responsible publishers before attempting to set itself up as a 'Supreme Court' of the media in America," he said.